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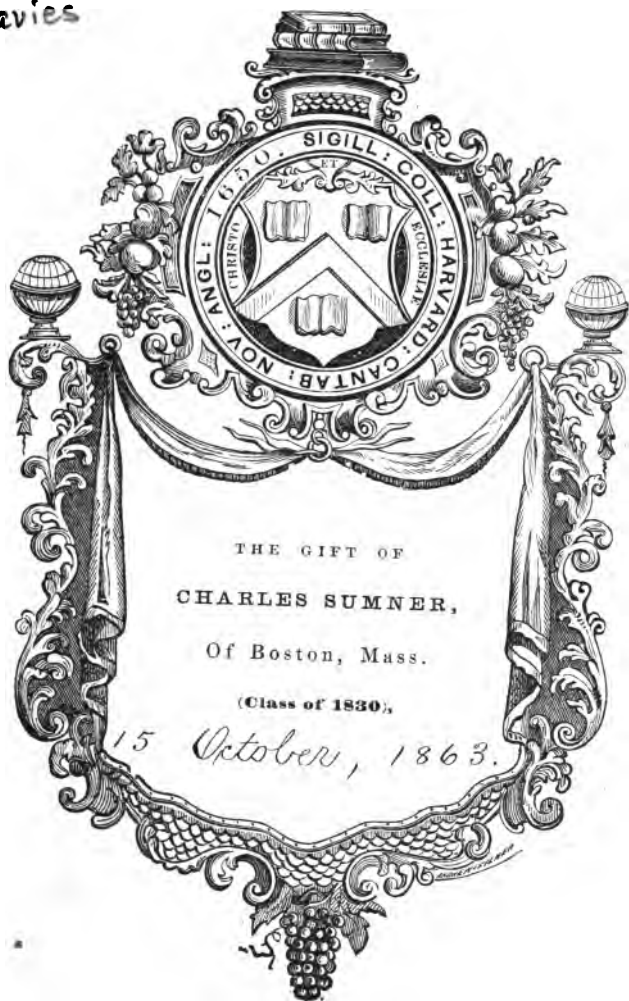
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LETTERS
ON THE
Miraculous Conception.

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LETTERS
ON
The Miraculous Conception.

A
VINDICATION
OF
The Doctrine

MAINTAINED IN

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT BELPER, IN DERBYSHIRE;

IN

ANSWER

To the Rev. Mr. ALLIOTT, and the Rev.
Mr. TAYLOR. *See p. 1.*

By DAVID DAVIES.

———after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets.—PAUL.

Belper:

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LETTERS

ON THE

MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION.

LETTER I.

SIR,

TRUTH is an object worthy the attention and pursuit of every rational creature; and the attainment of it ought to be the grand end of all our researches. It was with a view to the assistance of my fellow-christians in the acquirement of it, that I composed my Sermon for Christmas-Day last; with that view it was delivered; and with that view it was sent into the world. —

Conscious that the doctrine there maintained was well founded, I professed myself ready to meet any one who might dispute it, and wished to have a further opportunity of fairly discussing a subject which was there but partially treated upon. Two gentlemen, the Rev. Mr. *Alliott*, of *Nottingham*, and the Rev. Mr. *Taylor*, of *Mile-End-Road*, *London*, in Letters to

2 *Letters on the Miraculous Conception.*

their friends, have gratified that wish; and I am happy to have it in my power, again to come forward, as the advocate of rational religion and genuine christianity.

Mr. *Alliott*, whose publication was prior in point of time, will of course demand my first attention. I cannot less than lament at the discovery of the spirit—the unchristian, the uncandid, the unmanly spirit, which breathes throughout his pages. His pen seems to have been dipped in the very gall of controversy, and guided by a hand, whose director was a heart which possessed but little of the all-inspiring charity of our benevolent Master. He taxes me with intentions hostile to the christian religion; with a design “to lessen the esteem in which christianity and the great Author of it are held by professing christians.” He asserts that it is “impossible” for me, to have the credit of the christian religion, or the honor of my Saviour at heart; and with more than Papal uncharitableness, belies all my professions of sincerity. “But who art thou that judgest the servant of another?”—who has exalted him to the throne of the Omnicient, from whence he professes to see the secrets of his fellow-creatures’ hearts, and presumes to condemn them for motives of which they are as innocent as he is? There is a tribunal before which, we both must appear ere long—a tribunal whose great Director is neither governed by the interest of a party,

nor actuated by any of those passions which too often inhabit the human breast: there, and there only, it will be seen whose motives are right and whose are wrong; and to that would I appeal for that uprightness of intention, which he is unwilling to concede to me.

He enters on the discussion of the subject, with a determination not to believe what his opponent may say. He is resolved to abide by his present creed, or give up (at least in part) his "respect for christianity, his esteem for its Author, his regard for its precepts, and his confidence in his Bible." Is this I would ask the proper frame of mind for one, who has nothing more in view than the attainment of truth, and the direction of his fellow-creatures in the way that leads to it? Is it with eyes thus blinded, with a mind thus warped by bigotry to a set of opinions that he can come forward, as the fair disputant, unprejudiced and unbiassed? No, his jaundiced eye will throw a tinge over the most fair arguments, and his partial pen condemn as unprincipled the most ardent lover of truth.

I am not surprised therefore, when he charges me with "proud asperity," and with calumniating. But permit me to ask, where have I called "those who differ from me, ignorant and designing?" He has quoted them, with an unfairness not infrequent in his pages, as my words; but they are not to be found in my writings, and I challenge him to produce one

passage, which does not accord with the charity there recommended. I do say that I may become "subject to the calumniating tongue of the ignorant and the designing:" and who but the designing and ignorant will traduce a man's character for the opinions he entertains? I think better of my fellow-christians who differ from me, than to suppose them *all* capable of so much injustice. There are those who differ from me in opinion, to whom I am bound by the closest ties that bind man to man, and who, while I detest their tenets, I admire as men.— There are others who deserve the epithets given there; but I hope for the honor of our common christianity, that their number is but few. I am aware of the unpopularity of my doctrines; I am no stranger to the *charitable* terms by which the *reputed* orthodox are pleased to describe me; I have heard how I and my opinions have been anathematized from their pulpits; of their charges forbidding the perusal of my Sermon; and the long train of mean artifices to which error always resorts, in order to hide its own defects. But truth is not to be frightened by declamation. It is error that skulks in corners, robes itself in mystery, and dreads the approach of investigation. Truth invites us to the closest scrutiny, and never appears to so great advantage as when most examined.

At the same time I can feel for them. I have myself once experienced the chilling gales, have

harboured the unsocial spirit of gloomy Calvinism. Unitarianism, the worship of ONE true and living GOD, as set forth in the pure, simple, and unadulterated gospel of JESUS CHRIST, is advancing with a steady pace; they cannot less than view its progress with a jealous eye; they cannot less than feel alarmed, when they find that the very foundation of the lofty and venerable pile, which the superstition of ages has raised, and the enthusiasts of centuries have so much admired, has received so many attacks, that it trembles, and seems as if it would bury its sanguine upholders under its ruins. This is but the dawn of the day of truth, every succeeding one will witness the advance of its sun towards its meridian; and as it rises it will dispel the thick mist of error which now envelopes us.

By the perusal of the following pages Mr. A. will find, that the Sermon, which to me was so unexpectedly published, is so far from containing "the collected force of a party," that it does not even contain *all* the arguments of the *individual*, whose character, and not whose doctrine, he endeavours to ridicule by his ill-timed and ill-managed irony. I profess a blind attachment to no party; I am an impartial, unprejudiced searcher after truth, and am determined to follow where ever it leads me. My utmost wish is to discover "the truth as it is in Jesus," my highest ambition to deserve the ve-

nerable name of christian. Mr. A. most certainly deserves, and I doubt not has received the congratulations and thanks of his orthodox brethren; and if declamation is to be substituted for sound reasoning, and notes of admiration are to supply the place of solid arguments, then his triumph will be as lasting as their partial encomiums are high.

But in every candid bosom, has the tribunal been erected before which he has been arraigned. This is not an age in which error, however specious it may appear, can escape undetected. There are *many* who dare to think for themselves, and every day sees an addition to their number.

From Mr. *Taylor*, that veteran (as he acknowledges himself to be) in the field of controversy, I must confess I expected more liberality and less irritation. In the contemplation of an opponent, whose learning and experience were rendered venerable by grey hairs, nothing but the consciousness of being engaged in a good cause, could animate me to support a contest which our years and experience rendered so unequal. But the possession of truth, it is well known, is the exclusive privilege of no rank or circumstance of life: and though it may appear presumptuous in me to call in question what has received the sanction of the multitude for so many centuries, and is, at this moment, apparently confirmed by the assent of so many

learned men, yet I feel myself bound, as a teacher of the christian system, to discard every inferior motive, and to declare my opinions without reserve, or wish of palliation. Mr. T. says that "my spirit and language have been seldom equalled, unless by the unhappy *Woolston* and *Thomas Paine*," and that he "should not be astonished to hear, that at some future time, I should rank among the deists and atheists as my principal companions." But the contemplation of such an event has cost him, good kind man! some throes of an overflowing benevolence, and has occasioned him "great distress." It is surprising how an undue attachment to a set of opinions will lead men to impose upon themselves, and to deceive others. The advocates of the system which I am now endeavouring to defend, are so far from being deistical or atheistical in sentiment or practice, that I will venture to say, that no class of men have done, or are doing so much for the defence of christianity. The works which have immortalized the names of a *Priestley* and a *Lindsey*, will be held in esteem as the bulwarks of the gospel of Jesus, when the rhapsody of enthusiasts, and the mysterious jargon of superstition shall have been buried in their merited oblivion. But such ill-natured passages as those above, dictated by a blind, though I dare say sincere zeal, will have but little influence on the world at large, while our conduct and

teachings are open to their inspection. "By our fruit we shall be known,"—we shrink not from the test.

Mr. T. talks a great deal about "magisterial assertions," and my "boldness" in the declaration of my sentiments. But he has forgot, while he is censuring me, to keep within the limits he himself prescribes. To say that to give proofs that there are "interpolations" in the Bible is "more than I or any other man can do," p. 5, and to lay down a proposition, and then say that it is impossible for "me or any other man to prove the contrary," p. 29, savors I think a little of "magisterial assertions," if not of dogmatism; and tempts me to retort upon him his own words, p. 35, and ask "must wisdom die with *him*, is *he* qualified to decide in this positive manner?" At the same time, I think that when a man is fully convinced of the truth of a doctrine, and is capable of defending it, he has a *right* to declare it with *boldness*, while he neither quarrels with, nor condemns any man for differing with him.

After all Mr. T. has said, every one possessed of the least candor, will be ready to own, that when the circumstances under which my Sermon was sent into the world, and the time allowed for the delivery of it, are considered, the subject is as largely treated upon, and the arguments as well supported, as could be expected. Both he and Mr. A. have found it so.

They have spent much time and labor, in endeavouring to overthrow arguments, which from their futility, they would have their readers believe were not worth their notice. How far they have succeeded is left to the decision of the Public, and to my examination in the following pages.

Yours, &c.

LETTER II.

SIR,

MISREPRESENTATION has, in every age of the christian church, been the principal means by which the corruptors of christianity have established their tenets; and those, in the present age, who are the advocates of these corruptions, have recourse to the same unfair method of supporting them. Thus it is, that Unitarianism is held up as a religious *bugbear* to frighten the ignorant and credulous; its doctrines are represented as unscriptural; those who profess it are said to be atheistical and deistical; to be mere moralists, depending wholly on the merits of their own good works for salvation, while they are entirely devoid of that devotion of heart, which so eminently distin-

guishes those, who appropriate to themselves the much perverted term of *evangelical*.

The generality of men are fond of what is grand, and not being able to distinguish between what is great and that which is absurd, they give their assent to what they are not able to comprehend, satisfying their own minds, that what is proposed to them, by those who make professions of such superior sanctity, must be true; and if its credibility is not to be ascertained by the standard of reason, they must rest satisfied with the idea that it is above reason. Thus it is, that tenets, however absurd, are implicitly believed; and, strange as it may appear, the true doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ are rejected, for no other reason, than that they are too plain and too simple.

The titles given by Mr. *Alliott*, and Mr. *Taylor*, to their pamphlets, have led me to these preliminary remarks. The one is *Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God*, the other *Jesus, the only begotten Son of God*. The stress laid by these gentlemen on these titles bestowed upon our Lord, is to me surprising. Whether it is their ignorance of the sentiments of the body of christians they think they are attacking through me, or their desire to bias the minds of the public against them, I know not; but it is evident that they misrepresent them.—That Jesus Christ is “the Son of God, the only begotten Son of God,” no one that called himself a christian, to my knowledge ever denied; and every Unitarian will immediately

grant the truth of the proposition, which Mr. A. lays as the foundation of his reply ; and on which Mr. T. places no little stress. Mr. A. employs almost half his pamphlet to prove that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He might have spared himself the trouble, I believe it as firmly as he does ; but I deny the inference he draws, “ that because he was called the Son, the only begotten Son of God,” that he must therefore have been miraculously born.

Mr. A. says, p. 9, “ that the language of Christ, and the language of his followers intimate in the clearest manner that he thought himself, and that they thought him the Son of God in a way different from all other persons.” If he means that Christ was the Son of God by the derivation of existence in a manner *differing* from all other men, this the scriptures do not intimate, and consequently he has not been able to prove. The word *only-begotten*, as used, in the New Testament, has no reference to a higher production, or to a different generation to other men : it only expresses a higher degree of affection. Thus Isaac is called, Heb. xi. 17, the only-begotten son of Abraham. But it is not intended that we should understand by this, that Abraham had no other sons, for he had many more by Hagar and Keturah ; nor are we to think that he had no human father. What we are to understand by it is, that Isaac was peculiarly the favorite and distinguished son of Abraham. In the same manner we are to understand the appellation when bestowed

upon Jesus Christ. God exalted him above his fellows; he had destined him to be the Saviour of mankind; to give them a perfect model for their imitation in his spotless example; and to this end he bestowed upon him so much wisdom, and imparted to him so much power, as was possessed by no man before.

For the instruction of the English reader, the Greek word (*monogenes*) "only-begotten," would have been much better translated "beloved;" for it is evident that John, who alone of all the writers of the New Testament, with only one or two exceptions, makes use of the word as applicable to Christ, uses it when others would have said (*agapetos*) "beloved." But I will examine some of the passages, in which Christ represents himself as "the Son of God," and see whether there is any foundation for Mr. A's assertion, p. 12, "that his representation exactly agrees with the doctrine of the miraculous conception." "That Christ and his disciples used language which strongly implied it," p. 8. The passages in John v. 25, iii. 18, ix. 35—38, x. 36, need no commentary, they merely prove that he was the Son of God, which is granted. "He spoke," says Mr. A. "of God and to God as his father in the plainest terms. Yes, and taught his disciples to do the same. In this manner therefore pray ye, 'Our Father who art in heaven,' Matt. vi. 9. If then this mode of address proves Jesus to be miraculously born, it equally proves his disciples to be so. "He spoke of the glory which

he had with the Father before the world was," Matt. xvii. 5. But Mr. A. does not tell us what this glory was. The glory he here prays for is, that of instructing, and converting mankind, verses 14, 18; this glory he says, v. 22, he had given to his apostles, they therefore must have had it with the Father before the world was. The meaning consequently is, that it was the Father's decree and purpose, that his Son should be glorified. Jesus therefore prays for him to accomplish his design.— Similar is the expression in Rev. xiii. 8, "The Lamb slain before the foundation of the world." But Christ, who is here figuratively called a Lamb, was not slain till four thousand years after the creation. "And no one knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son chooseth to reveal him," Matt. xi. 27. That is no one can comprehend the extent and object of the Son's commission for enlightening mankind, but the Father; and no one but the Son is acquainted with the plan which the Father has designed for this end. "I came forth from God," John xvi. 27. I was sent by God as a messenger to mankind. The same is the phraseology used in the description of the appearance of John the Baptist. "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John," John i. 6. But did the Baptist come from heaven?—"That all men should honor the Son as they honor the Father, John v. 23. This verse does not imply that we should worship Christ; the honor he here required consists in paying obe-

dience to his gospel. He explains himself in the following verses. "I and the Father are one," John x. 30. Not one in person, nor one in essence, but one in design in propogating the gospel. This union is explained in his prayer, John xvii. 11. "That they may be *one* as we are *one*."

Thus far I have followed this immethodical writer in his profuse quotation of texts, whose meaning he has endeavoured to pervert, to support an hypothesis which has no foundation in scripture. And it is in this manner, by the production of isolated passages, without the least regard to the connection in which they stand, that error is made to appear plausible; the ignorant are deluded; and scripture made to prove what it never intended. It is evident, that the passages which Mr. A. and Mr. T. have brought forward on this head, have not the least relation to the subject, when they are properly understood; and that the terms "Son of God, only-begotten Son of God," have no other meaning, than that "Jesus of Nazareth, was a MAN from God manifested to the world by mighty works, and wonderful signs which God did by him," Acts ii. 22.

Paul says Rom. i. 3, that Jesus "was born of the race of David according to the flesh, but proved to be *the Son of God by power, according to the holy spirit through his resurrection from the dead.*" Here then we see, if we can rely on an eminent apostle, that it was, by his resurrection from the dead, that Jesus Christ

was fully entitled to the appellation of "Son of God." And here I cannot less than notice, though it may be out of place, the contradiction between the pretended and the real Luke. The angel is made to tell Mary, Luke i. 35, that Jesus should be called "the Son of God" *because* he was miraculously born; but the real Luke never once styles him, when speaking in his own person, "the Son of God" till after his resurrection; and then after he had been raised by the immediate power of the Almighty, he speaks of him as being publicly called the Son of God.

The Jews were aware that the title of "Son of God," was to be peculiarly applicable to their Messiah, but they had never heard such a reason given for the appellation as the angel had given. They understood from the prophecies recorded in the book of Psalms, that God himself had given him that denomination many hundred years before he was born; "thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee;" but it is evident, that the begetting here spoken of, has no reference to a carnal birth, but to his regeneration after death to a new and spiritual state of existence. The terms Christ and Son of God they considered as synonymous; and when Jesus declared himself to be the Son of God, they understood him, most undoubtedly, to declare himself to be their great Messiah, and, in their infatuation, procured his condemnation as an enemy of Cæsar's. "If," says Mr. A. "he had been the

Son of Joseph, this would have been the time to have explained himself, and by so doing have lessened (at least) the asperity of his persecutors." But the Jews well knew that he was the Son of Joseph; it needed no declaration of his to make that known to them. "He was aware that to support the title of "Son of God," it was not necessary that he should have been brought to existence, without the instrumentality of a human father.

But though Jesus Christ claims the title of Son of God in a *superior degree*, yet he does not in "a *different manner* from all other men." Mr. A. is conscious of this; indeed it cannot be denied; but he endeavours to do away our Lord's explanation of the term, by saying, "that our Lord argued with the Jews on their own principles;"—let that be granted—but did he argue with them on false principles?—If not, then, what he wished to impress on the minds of his hearers must be true—that all good men might be called the Sons of God; but that he might apply it to himself in the strictest sense. We are all the offspring of God, and the nearer approaches we make to our great exemplar Jesus Christ, the greater claim we have to the appellation of "Sons of God."

Thus I think that Jesus, though considered as a *mere man*, but at the same time a man super-eminently endowed with the spirit of God, is "justified in using the language he

did of himself, and his disciples in using it of him."

There is a sentence at the conclusion of Mr. A's second letter, which I cannot less than notice. It is this, "Whether he were the Son of God, in any more *abstruse* and *difficult* way to *comprehend* is not necessary for us at present to inquire." We may easily perceive the drift of this. But to harbour the thought, that the great God should generate a being, according to the human idea attached to that word, is most indecent and profane. In the ages of Gothic superstition and ignorance, such expressions as, "eternal generation," and many more such gross and contradictory phrases may be overlooked; but what can be said in vindication of a teacher of christianity, who talks such blasphemous jargon at the commencement of the nineteenth century?

Yours, &c.

LETTER III.

SIR,

HAVING thus far cleared my way through the rubbish thrown by my opponents between me and the main question, I am at last hap-

B

pily arrived at it. I shall follow the same order as I have before laid down in my Sermon, and take notice of what each of the gentlemen have said of the different branches of it, when I come to them.

I have said, that "the doctrine of the miraculous conception, is contrary to the predictions of the prophets of the Old Testament." This is an important consideration. The Jewish scriptures as they have been considered by Christ himself, and by all his followers in every age, as the foundation of the christian system; so Jewish prophecy must be the only criterion by which we can judge of the truth of the christian doctrine. If the account given, in the New Testament of the appearance of Jesus Christ, does not agree with the predictions of the Jewish prophets, the conclusion will naturally be, that he was not the person foretold by them, and that their Messiah has not yet appeared. Which shall we then give up, the account of the miraculous conception, or the certainty of the appearance of the Jewish Messiah?—one of them must be given up, for they are contradictory. Fortunately we need not hesitate long before we come to a determination. Jesus Christ *was* the promised Messiah, and his appearance agreed, in every respect, with the prophecies delivered concerning him.

From the prophecy of Moses, recorded in Deut. xviii. 15, I have said, that we are taught to expect the Jewish Messiah to be a man, constituted and formed, like another man. Mr.

Alliott and Mr. Taylor say, that the resemblance here intimated refers to the similarity of their "prophetic characters." I grant that it has a reference to his prophetic character; but was Christ a prophet *like unto Moses* if he possessed a different nature to Moses? The prophetic words are so express, that they will not allow the explaining away their plain meaning: "God will raise up unto thee of *thy brethren*, a prophet from the midst of thee like unto me;" that is, the Lord will exalt a man, of the Jewish nation, to the distinguished situation of such a prophet as I am. Now is it not evident, that for a pre-existent angel, or the MIGHTY GOD, (as Mr. T. from not being able to understand a text,* will have Jesus Christ to be) to become incarnate, and commissioned to every office that Moses was, is so

* Isaiah ix. 6. This verse should thus be rendered, according to the original Hebrew:—"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called wonderful, counsellor;" (or as it is in the Septuagint, a Greek translation generally used by our Saviour and his apostles, "messenger of the great design"), "the mighty one, the father of the future age,† the prince of peace."—This rendering seems to be most authentic, and was employed by the most ancient christian fathers, when they quoted this prophecy.

† "In the Oriental style, a person who excels in any particular quality, is called the father of that quality. Thus a famous physician, much praised for his skill, was called *the father of benediction*. So here the Messiah is called *the father of eternity*, his authority being designed to be of long continuance."—Priestley in loco.

far from being a "*raising up*," an *exaltation*, that it is a degradation from a heavenly existence, to sustain the infinitely inferior character of a human prophet. And, on the other hand, if he was a mere man, but a man created without the intervention of a human father, by the miraculous power of the holy spirit; he is neither like one of the Jewish people, like Moses, nor like any thing else that was ever heard of, since the creation of the world. The creator has never interrupted his system for the propagation of mankind, from the formation of Adam to the present time. Is it not likely then, if he was going to break in upon so universal a law, that he would not have given some intimation of it to Moses and the other prophets? But though things of very inferior importance concerning Christ are foretold, with a scrupulous minuteness, not the most distant hint is given of this extraordinary intervention of the Almighty power!

The next prophecy which demands my attention is that quoted by Peter, Acts ii. 30, from Psalm cxxxii. 11, as relating to Christ. It is there said, "that God had sworn with an oath that of the fruit of his (David's) loins, he would place successors on his throne." *The fruit of his loins* is a phrase so very strong, that it is impossible for any one to misunderstand it. "The fruit of the loins," says Parkhurst, the Hebrew Lexicographer, "denotes the offspring of a man." The phrase has uniformly the same meaning, wherever it is used in scrip-

ture:—in 1. Kings xiii. 19, the Lord says unto David, “thy son that shall come forth out of thy loins,” &c. Jesus Christ therefore must have had a human father, otherwise he could *not* have been the fruit of David’s loins.

Mr. A. says, p. 19, that the Jews “expected the Messiah to come forth from God in an extraordinary way;” but as he has brought no arguments to prove, what he would, in his usual scurrilous manner, have termed in me, “a gratuitous affirmation,” I shall pass on to what Mr. T. says on the same point. I have said, Sermon p. 8, that the Jews expected their Messiah to be the natural and lineal descendant of the male issue of David. But Mr. T. says no—“some of the ancient Jewish writers, expected the Messiah to be brought forth into the world, in a way different from that in which all others are.” This, he says, is clearly shewn by bishop Chandler. Indeed? How comes it to pass then, that Mr. T. should write in a way so very “different” from the good bishop, as not more powerfully and effectually to overthrow “the strange assertions of Mr. Davies, to which so little regard *can* safely be paid,” p. 41. From the sample he has given us of the bishop’s clearness in his own *overwhelming* arguments, we have some cause to doubt *his* assertion.

He says, “that Isaiah and Jeremiah, two eminent Jewish prophets, have taught us contrary to my strange assertions.” The passage in Isaiah will be considered when we come to

it; and I am not afraid but it will be proved, contrary to Mr. T's apprehensions, that it does *not* speak of the Messiah. The passage he has quoted, p. 28, from Jer. xxxi. 22, as revealing our Saviour's miraculous conception, and in p. 40, to prove the expectation of the Jewish nation, serves only to shew to what shifts error resorts, in order to support itself. Let any one read that verse, in the connection in which it stands with the context, and admire the wonderful skill of orthodoxy, in perverting the sense of scripture to answer its own purpose.—Below* you will find an explanation of this text by an eminent divine.—“John the Baptist was a *Jew*,” says Mr. T. “and he testifies of Christ, that he came from above, and from heaven.” John himself is said, John i. 6, to have been sent from God, and his baptism from heaven, Matt. xxi. 25, and if John's coming from heaven means (as it evidently does) his receiving a divine commission, then the same must be intended, when the language is applied to Christ; and when John speaks of Jesus' coming from above, in contradistinction to himself, he can only mean to express the

* “The Hebrew nation is called a *virgin*, as a weak, defenceless woman, who might therefore be afraid of a strong man in whose power she was. But the Divine Being encourages her, with the prospect of his interposing in her favor, and enabling her though a woman, to overcome the strongest man. The meaning is, that the Hebrew nation, though weak and dispersed, would find no power able to prevent their re-establishment.”—Priestley in loco.

great superiority of our Lord's character, commission, and powers, to his own. "Paul was a Jew," says Mr. T. again, "and he tells us, that the Son of God was made of a woman." Made or born (for they have the same meaning, both being derived from the same Greek verb, *ginomai*) "made or born of a woman," is a common Jewish phrase, to express a proper human being, see Job xiv. i, "Man that is born of a woman," and Matt. xi. 11, "Among those that are born of women, &c." Thus Mr. T's famous Jewish testimony to the miraculous conception falls to the ground; and he may now, perhaps, be lead "to conclude that Mr. D. had maturely considered the subject."

I shall defer bringing my testimony from scripture against the miraculous conception to its proper place; and bring on what other Jewish writers say on the subject. And surely their testimony, on this point, is of more value, and carries with it more weight, than that of all the Chandlers, the Alixs, the Watts, and the Flemings, with which Mr. T. swells his pages.

"Observe," says the author of Nizzachon Vetus, who was a Jew, "how they confute themselves; for if, as they say, Jesus had no father, how can he be descended from the stock of David? But if the genealogy of Joseph be given to prove that he was of the house of David, Joseph must be his father. How then do you assert that he had no human father?"* Rab-

* Nizzachon Vetus p. 72, 73.

bi Nachmanides says, "if your Messiah was descended from David, meaning by the mother's side, he could not be the heir of his kingdom, because females do not inherit while any male issue remains."* "Both these genealogies," says Rabbi Isaac in his *Munidem fidei*, "belong to Joseph only and not to Jesus; for they say that Joseph had no commerce with Mary his mother; and as to that of Mary it is altogether unknown."†

Here then we see, that the Jews make the miraculous conception a serious objection against christianity; they expected their Messiah to be, according to the prediction of their prophets, a man like one of themselves. And never will they be brought to embrace christianity, and to acknowledge Jesus to be their Messiah, until this abominable, fabulous account of his birth be exploded from the christian belief.

But says Mr. A. "in answer to this mode of reasoning, I beg leave to suggest the following queries:—Whether Mary, the mother of our Lord, was not a descendant of Abraham and David?" Whether she was, or was not, is impossible to determine. There is no account given of her descent. Her relationship to Elizabeth, if the authenticity of the chapters in which it is alledged, could be allowed, would not prove her to be of the house of David; for

* *Ibid.* Page 53. † Page 390. Taken from Priestley's *Early Opinions*, vol. iv. p. 115, 116, 117.

she might have been Elizabeth's cousin, and yet not have had an Israelitish father. But allowing Mary to have been of the tribe of Judah, how came she to be related to Elizabeth, who was not only of the tribe of Levi, but "of the daughters of Aaron?" Among the Jewish tribes, the tribe of Levi, and especially the family of Aaron, were set apart to the fulfilment of the offices of the temple; and could not intermarry into another tribe. "If it be admitted," says Mr. A. "that the mother of our Lord was a descendant of Abraham and David, then her ancestors were the ancestors of her children." True, they were so; but they being their *maternal* ancestors, did not constitute them their *legal* predecessors, or the children their *legal* heirs. Look into the testimony of the Jews before given, and to that of Dr. Whitby given in my Sermon, and it is proved, that it was impossible for Jesus to have inherited in the female line. So that Jesus might have been descended maternally from David, and yet the prediction not be verified in him. What promogenitureship has to do with the question I am at a loss to guess; and if it had, was not Jesus Mary's first-born?

Mr. T. says, p. 40, that whether Jesus is descended from Abraham by male issue or *female issue*, has nothing to do with the question, "or with the accomplishment of the promise to Abraham." But we see that it has; and upon this depends the truth of the Messiah's appear-

ance. "The derivation of Mary's genealogy," says an eminent writer,* "from David and Abraham, will not remove the obvious contradiction, between this story of the miraculous conception of her Son, and those scriptures which assert, that he was the *seed* of Abraham, and the *fruit of the loins* of David; for the female, from whatever family descended, is no more than the seed-bed, formed to mature the seed of the male; and therefore in the genealogies of all nations, the children are accounted the *seed* or lineal descendants of the male line only, without any regard to the family, or even nation of the female. Thus for example, David is justly accounted the seed of Abraham, and as true an Israelite as any other descendant from Jacob, tho' he and his father Jesse were the offspring of Obed the son of a Moabitish woman. Were it true therefore, that the Almighty in the single instance of Mary's conception, had miraculously created seed, like that of the human species, to become an embryo in her womb, to be matured and brought forth like other children after the usual period of gestation; yet such a child would no more be the seed of Abraham, nor the fruit of David's loins, than Adam himself. He would be

* The late learned and reverend Edward Evanson, A. M. to whose excellent Letter on the Trinity the author of these sheets owes his emancipation, from the fangs of error and superstition; and to whose other writings he is much indebted, for a rational and consistent explanation of many parts of scripture.

the seed of no man ; but like the first created of our species, the immediate production of the plastic power of God. For this reason, either this very extraordinary history of Mary's miraculous conception of her son Jesus, must be false and fabulous, or else Jesus is not the Messiah promised to the Jews."*

Mr. A. when on this head, p. 25, note, puts the same question to me, as our Saviour formerly did to the Jews, Matt. xxii. 42—46, "If Christ were a man not distinguished from other men, by the participation of a superior nature, how was he David's Lord?" "The doctrines of his pre-existence and supernatural conception," he says, remove the difficulty and fully explain the subject." But if the Jews, as he alleges, p. 19, "expected their Messiah to come forth from God in an extraordinary way," how came it to pass, as Matthew tell us, "that no one was able to answer him?" Why not, if they really were of the same opinion as Mr. A. give the same answer as he does? The truth is, the doctrine of the miraculous conception was not then invented, and therefore it was impossible. The sense of the text is this:—some of the Jewish sects disbelieved in the resurrection. Jesus, to convince them of their error, puts his own case to them; and asks, how the Messiah, who was to be a son of David, could also be his Lord? The conclusion which he would have had them draw, from such a question, is evidently this, that by dy-

* Dissonance, p. 72.

ing to this mortal life, he would cease to be David's son; and that by his resurrection to a spiritual life, he was exalted to the right hand of God, and made not only Lord of David, but of all the generations of men.

The two genealogies in Matthew and Luke, completely establish what has been before advanced:—that the Jews expected their Messiah to have had a human father, and Joseph was the man. Mr. *A.* thinks, that “Matthew gives the genealogy of Joseph, and Luke of Mary, and that Joseph was the son of Jacob, and the adopted son of Heli the father of Mary, and that Joseph and Mary were of the same family.” But this is mere supposition; and, as he himself says, *one fact is worth many surmises*. Many of the ancients believed that the two genealogies belonged to Joseph, and Mr. *T.* seems to agree with them. Africanus says, that Eusebius “thought that Joseph was the son of Heli by law, and of Jacob by nature, Jacob and Heli being brothers.”* Jerome says, “that Joseph’s genealogy is mentioned, because it was not the custom of scriptures to reckon genealogies according to women.”† But what end could the genealogies then answer? If Jesus was the son of Mary only, the pedigree of Joseph is of no use. They might as well have inserted the genealogy of Alexander the Great. Mr. *T.* says, that when Christ was pre-

* Hist. lib. i. cap. 7, p. 23, 25.

† In. Matt. cap. i. Opera vol. vi. p. 1.

seated in the temple, the name of Joseph was entered on the register as his father, by the priest, who knew nothing of his miraculous conception. But then how came Matthew and Luke, who, according to the spurious accounts attached to their genuine gospels, were *not ignorant* of it, to copy this false pedigree, to perpetuate the error, and to impose upon their readers: for an imposition it certainly is, if Joseph was not his father? Mr. T. says, p. 49, "that when the Evangelists speak in the genealogies of Joseph and Jesus, they particularly *vary* in their language, and that this variation can never be accounted for, but on the ground of our Lord's miraculous conception." But what is intended by these genealogies, is it not to prove that Joseph was descended from David? And if so, the husband of the mother must certainly be the father of her son.— But says Mr. T. p. 44, "Our blessed Redeemer was the son of Mary as a *virgin*, who was afterwards married to Joseph, and this manner of speaking is perfectly according to that of the Jewish law. 'The man to whom she is betrothed is called her husband.'" But why has he overlooked another Jewish law, recorded in the same chapter, Deut. xxii. 20, 21, where it is said, that if a damsel is betrothed to a husband, and when they come together the husband say, "I came to her and found her not a maid," and "if this thing be true, then shall they bring the damsel to the door of her father's house, and stone her till she die." This

law was violated in the case of Mary; and is it consistent with the character of a just God, to establish laws, and not abide by them himself? God forbid that we should think so! And we may rest assured, if this *fabulous* account of Mary's situation before marriage, had been true, it would, some way or other, have come to the knowledge of the Jewish rulers, and she punished.

I do not, therefore, hesitate a moment, to say, that there is a glaring inconsistency, between the genealogies and the account the impostors intended them to establish. The genealogies, by whoever written, coincide with the expectations of the Jews and the predictions of their prophets, that Jesus Christ was to be the son of a man, and Joseph was the person.

Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

SIR,

IN very early times the supporters of the miraculous conception, became aware of the disagreement of that doctrine with the expectations of the Jews, and the fulfilment of their prophecies; and its contradiction to the plain

declarations of Jesus himself. And as the leading doctrines of modern orthodoxy, are evidently contrary to those revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is natural for us to have recourse to the pages of Ecclesiastical History, in order to ascertain the time when they first became prevalent.

It was not until the Council of Nice, assembled A. D. 325, for the condemnation of the Arian heresy, that the triumph of orthodoxy became complete. The advocates for the pure doctrines of christianity had made a noble struggle; but they were overpowered by numbers, and silenced by authority: for Constantine, who was then invested with the Roman purple, sided with the triumphant party, and the christian world, has now for near fifteen centuries, bestowed implicit faith in the determination of a majority of a few biggotted and wrangling bishops, on a subject which claims the *personal* attention and examination of every man. "Thus," as Mr. Gibbon says, "the prerogatives of the King of Heaven, were settled, changed, and modified, in the cabinet of an earthly monarch."* Very great opposition was made in this council to the establishment of the Trinity; a word, as well as a doctrine, until then almost unknown: and the christian world at large, which before firmly believed in the supremacy and unity of *ONE* God, was awed, by the power of an emperor, to the admission of *three* distinct and infinite

* Decline and Fall, vol. iii. p. 345.

minds; *three* co-equal and co-eternal beings, composing the divine essence. The Son and the Holy Spirit were then, for the first time, exalted, by human vote, to the throne of Divinity; and the foundation was laid upon which was built, in after times, that anti-logical structure of the Athenasian creed; a composition containing as many direct contradictions, as possibly could have been made in so little compass. We trace this source of the corruption of christianity through its various windings, until we come to the year 431, and "this being an age in which great compliments were paid to the Virgin Mary, among other appellations, it became customary to call her the *mother of God*, and this was a favorite term with the followers of Apollinarius. This phraseology Nestorius, who had distinguished himself by his opposition to the Apollinarians, declared to be improper, and said it was sufficient to call her the *mother of Christ*. To justify this, he was led to assert, that *there are two distinct natures in Christ*, the divine and the human, and that Mary was the mother of the latter only."* But a Council was held at Ephesus in 431, by the order of Theodosius the Younger, where Nestorius was condemned unheard. But his doctrine has survived him. "In this factious manner was the great doctrine of the *hypostatical union* of the two natures in Christ (which has ever since been the

* Corrup. of Christianity, vol. i. p. 103.

doctrine of what is called the catholic church) established.”*

Here then we are arrived at the foundation of this error; this strong-hold to which modern orthodoxy flies to defend itself. Mr. *Alliott* and Mr. *Taylor* would have their readers believe, that Christ was possessed of two natures, the one human, the other divine; or to use the evangelical shiboleth, that *he was very God and very man*. But what are their arguments in support of a declaration so contradictory to every known law of nature? the belief must, most assuredly, be accompanied by very strong proofs: but they have brought none forward. They cannot. It has no foundation either in revelation or reason. Away then with such unintelligible jargon! Away with the darkness of mysteries, and the fooleries of human creeds, and let us embrace the pure, simple and God-like doctrines of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He has declared himself to be “the son of man.” Mr. *T.* asks me, “whether I can prove, that having an immediate human father is essential to his being the son of man?” I declare it, as my opinion, that it is essential; and, besides, I am of opinion, that nothing but the desire to reconcile absurd contradictions, could have induced him to put such a question to me. It is not *necessary* to prove what is *self-evident*; and it is impossible for us, according to our ideas of sonship, to reconcile the contradiction of

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* *Ibid.* Page 104.

being and *not being* the son of man. Our Saviour must have known this; and if he had not been the son of man in the universally received sense of the words, he would, on some occasion or other, have explained himself. He calls himself the son of man above forty times.—But, says Mr. T. “can he find no difference between the common scripture phrase, *son of man*, and *a son of man*, or son of *a man*.” If he has found a difference, why does *he* not declare it? I can find none, either in the Greek article, or in the sense of the common scripture phrase. Indeed the latter is uniform in pointing the son of *a man*. The Lord addresses Ezekiel viii. 12, 17.—xxi. 6, by the same appellation; and it is used in the same manner in many other places in scripture, where there cannot be the least doubt but *a man*, the son of *a man* is meant. That his being the son of *a man*, is reconcileable with his being the Son of God, I have amply proved in Letter 2.—Thus we see then, that the *hypostatical union*, that is, the union of a human, and a divine nature in the person of Christ, is a mere metaphysical subtilty, which orthodoxy has invented, to support its own unfounded tenets; and I need but appeal to the attentive reader of scripture for its erroneousness.*

*It is curious to observe, how the advocates of this mysterious union, get over that passage in Mark xiii. 32.—Jesus being asked when the destruction of Jerusalem would take place, says, “But of that day or hour, none knoweth; no not the angels that are in heaven, NOR THE SON.” If

I have said, in my Sermon, p. 13, that the doctrine of the miraculous conception "is contrary to the express language of our Lord and his disciples." Mr. A. says, that I have quoted but one expression of Christ's, and not one of of his disciples, to prove my "gratuitous affirmation." To the expression of Christ *he* thinks that he has "sufficiently replied." But *I think*, that his thoughts were rather too sanguine; and that, by a reference to the preceding pages, his reply will not be found so all-sufficient as he imagined it to be. He, as I have before observed, has laid the foundation of his evangelical philippic upon the sand. To deny the miraculous conception is, with him, equivalent, to denying that Jesus was the Son of God; but, strange as it may appear to him, I most firmly believe, that Jesus is the Son of God; and yet, for want of evidence, disbelieve in the miraculous conception:—and I have amply proved, the consistency of his appropriating to himself the title of Son of God, though brought to existence through the instrumentality of a human father; and, as he has founded his arguments on the supposition that I denied

Christ had been God he must have known it. But say the orthodox, *as a human being* he was ignorant of it, but not as God! "This equivocation in our Saviour," (says an ingenious writer) "if it were really the case with him, would be like a man who looking at another, shuts one of his eyes, and declares that he does not see him; and then, in way of vindication, says, I did not see him with *both* my eyes!"

him the appellation of Son of God, although he had a human father; my granting that, will reduce his reasoning to nothing. But that I have, "not made a single reference to the language of the disciples, is a false assertion; unless he denies Matthew and John to be of the number. The Evangelists continually style our Saviour, "the son of man." Paul, in many places in his different Epistles, calls him a man in the most direct terms. "For there is ONE GOD, and *one* Mediator also between God and men, the MAN CHRIST JESUS," 1 Tim. ii. 5. Peter calls him, "Jesus of Nazareth, *a man* sent from God," Acts ii. 22. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, ii. 17, says, "in all things it behoved him to be *made like unto his brethren.*" It is, however, needless to crowd my page with quotations of passages like these, for they may be met with in almost every chapter of the New Testament.

I have, in my Sermon, brought on the testimony of the men of the age in which Jesus lived, a evidence of his proper humanity; and certainly, none better could be produced, than that of persons by whom he was so well known. Their enmity towards him arose from political motives. It was because, that he, who was so well known to them to be the son of a poor carpenter, and who no doubt had often been the companion of their daily labors, should presume to appropriate to himself the distinguished title of their promised Messiah. It was the convincing and unquestionable evi-

dence of his right to it, visible in the mighty works that he performed, that first gave rise to that jealousy and envy in their breasts, which brought about the great and benevolent plan of Providence, for the salvation of the human race. And because I have brought forth their testimony, Mr. A. charges me with a coalition with the personal enemies of Christ against christianity; and breaks out in such a strain of scurrilous invective, as would disgrace my page even by a quotation—however, it is a good sample of orthodox logic, and of evangelical charity. Mr. T. and Mr. A. not being able to deny, that the coteremporaries of our Saviour thought him to be a man like themselves, wisely endeavour to depreciate their testimony, and attempt to account for their entertaining so heterodox an opinion. Mr. T. says, “it was evidently improper for them, *at that time*, to be informed of it.” But if the account given of our Saviour’s birth, in the spurious chapters attached to the gospels of Matthew and Luke, be true, it was *impossible* for it *not* to be known. Joseph and Mary were not the only persons in the secret. It was known to Elizabeth, Zacharias, and John the Baptist. It was known to the shepherds. It was revealed to the magicians, who came from the East; they communicated what they knew of him to Herod, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. For it is said, Matt. ii. 3, “when king Herod heard these things, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.” If, then, it was known to so many

thousands as composed the population of Jerusalem, is it likely that such surprising news should never have reached Nazareth, which was not more than a day's journey distant? If true, it must have been known there; and the "ignorance" (as Mr. T. terms it) which the townsmen of Jesus expose, arose not from the want of the intelligence of such a miraculous event, but from its never having existed, its never having been wrought! Upon this ground, I think, that the expressions of the men of Nazareth is a convincing argument against the miraculous conception.

Mr. A. says, p. 10, "Without some miraculous introduction into the world, they (the Jews) could not believe him to be their Messiah. If it be asked, why they were not told of his extraordinary conception? The answer is ready. They did not believe him, notwithstanding his mighty works; neither would they have believed that he was, in this remarkable way, the Son of God." This is a most curious passage. Let us examine it. First it is asserted, that a miraculous conception was *necessary* to constitute the Jewish Messiah. It has been proved otherwise. In the second place, it is granted, that though Jesus was thus miraculously born, on purpose to answer the expectation of the Jews concerning their Messiah;—though he could support the credibility of this extraordinary birth, by incontestible evidence;—and though this was the grand requisite to his sustaining the Messiah's character, and the

strongest argument in support of his right to it; yet that this was never made known during his ministry, *because* the Jews would not *believe* it! If this was truly the case, what further evidence need we to justify us in pronouncing it, a cunningly-devised fable? If the testimony delivered personally by Jesus and his brethren, was insufficient to convince the Jews of his own time, of an event that passed within their own knowledge, and in their own neighbourhood; how can it be expected that we should believe it, upon the testimony of a most suspicious and contradictory account, after the lapse of nearly eighteen hundred years?

Mr. T. p. 52, when on this point, says, that I have committed "a strange inadvertence." He says, that I have asserted, "of the miraculous conception there could be no witness, which all will acknowledge, and yet I say such an event must have been known to his neighbours." But so far from being guilty of an inadvertence, it is himself that has committed one, by confounding the meaning of words.—I have said, that of the *fact* of the miraculous conception there could be no witness, but the *event* must have been known to his neighbours.

That the nearest friends of Jesus for a long while doubted his claim to the Messiahship; I have brought on as an argument in my Sermon against the miraculous conception. Mr. A. allows, "that his brethren did not at first believe in him; but with respect to his mother," he says, "there is not a shadow of an evidence

of her unbelief, in the whole New Testament." Let us examine then, perhaps we may find not only the shadow, but the *substance*, of an evidence. I have before, in my Sermon, argued from the spurious chapters, in order to shew what contradictory accounts they give; this Mr. T. notices with a sneer, no doubt having a dislike to being attacked on his own ground. But I will have recourse to the same method in the case before me. It is said, Luke ii. 46, that "when the parents of Jesus found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the Teachers, both hearing and asking them questions, *they were amazed:*" and when he made them an answer, intimating, that he must prepare himself for the work of his future ministry, "*they understood not the thing which he spake unto them.*" Here then, I think, there is more than a *shadow* of an evidence of his mother's ignorance, that her son was to be the Messiah; for, if it had been revealed to her by an angel, as is related in the beginning of this very chapter, she would neither have been amazed at his appearance among the learned Jews, nor have been unable to comprehend an answer, which so plainly pointed at his future office. But leaving the impracticable task of harmonizing the dissonance of these spurious chapters, I shall pass on to more authentic documents, which will clearly settle the point. In Mark iii. 20, it is recorded, that when Jesus and his disciples had got into a house to eat bread, and the press of the multitude preventing them;

“when his friends heard of it, they went out (of their own house) to lay hold of him;—for they said, he is *beside himself*.” In the 31st. verse we are informed, who these friends were. “His brethren therefore and his *mother* came; and standing without, they sent unto him (calling him).” His mother, it appears, amongst the rest, thought him mad or insane.—What could induce her to entertain such thoughts, but that her son, poor and illiterate as he was, was doing and saying such things, as implied that he was the Messiah? She seems, then, to think her son mad for claiming a dignity, which an angel had told her many years before, he was born to aspire to, and to attain!

“While Mr. *D.*” says Mr. *A.* “shews against some christians on the the testimony of unbelievers, that we ought not to deem Christ, what he proposed (himself) to be, the Son of God; I should like to hear how he will shew against some Deists, who, on the same testimony, deny his divine mission altogether—that he was not, as these *favorite witnesses of his* called him, a deceiver.” Without noticing the illiberality, or the false assertion, contained in this sentence, I refer him to the perusal of these pages, as a specimen of my capability to defend the sacred truths of religion; assuring him, that in whatsoever light my efforts for that end, are viewed by my fellow-men, as they are guided by sincerity, I have no fear, but that they will meet the approbation of my God. But on his ground

it will be impossible to defend christianity, against the keen attacks of infidels. It is this fabulous account, of the birth of the founder of the christian system, that has made them so eloquent in their censures against it. What true friend to the christian, the best of religions, can read without a sigh the objections of men, who was it not for the account of the miraculous conception, would be an ornament to the profession of it; and who would not willingly lend his heart and hand to promote the cause of God and man, by divesting it of so unnecessary, and so disadvantageous an appendage?

Yours, &c.

LETTER V.

SIR,

THAT the canon of the New Testament, in its present state, is interpolated, no one who has critically studied it can well deny. Indeed it could not be otherwise. For centuries, the parts which constitute it were scattered over the christian world in detached manuscripts; and it has been found impossible to determine at what time it was settled, or when the books

which are now generally received by christians as canonical ; that is, as the genuine writings of their reputed authors, were admitted as of sacred authority into christian churches. The genuineness of some of the books which now compose it, has never been fully proved ; and it is by the internal evidence which they contain, that they are thought to be authentic, and very justly hold their rank among those which are not doubted.

Without mentioning a long list of learned men of the first ages, who from their rejection of some of the books which make up the New Testament, were accounted heretics ; I will only mention that Calvin, the great father and founder of the present orthodox church, was not very firm in the faith in this respect : for he “ had a very mean opinion, and doubted the canonical authority of the book of revelations.” Mr. Jeremiah Jones, in his valuable work on the canon, says, * “ the number of books which claim admission (into the canon of the church) are very considerable. Mr. Toland, in his celebrated catalogue, has presented us with the names of above eighty, which he would have us receive with the same authority, as those we now do ;” and that “ there are many more of the same sort, which he has not mentioned ;— their pretences are specious and plausible ; for the most part going under the name of our Saviour himself, his apostles, their companions, or immediate successors.”

* Vol. i. p. 4.

I have cited these passages to shew, that to pass spurious for genuine writings, was not so difficult a thing, as Mr. *A.* would have his readers believe it. If it was not "one of the easiest," it was not one of the most difficult, "things in the world, to add a few chapters to any work already published, and to impose them on the world, as parts of the original publication." We find, that not only were "parts," but that whole books, were published in the first ages of christianity, as the genuine and authentic works of Christ and his followers, which are long ago proved to be spurious.

Mr. *A.* asks me, "whether I ever knew of any such attempt having been made with tolerable success?" Let the existence, and the degree of credit attached by many, to the gospels of the infancy of Jesus, of Mary; of Thomas; of the gospel and acts of Peter; and many more which might be mentioned, which were once received as inspired writings, answer his question; and make him more cautious in future, than to risk a discovery of his ignorance of Ecclesiastical History by such questions.—And surely, this gentleman discovers no little want of general historical knowledge, when he talks of the equal possibility of making spurious pass for genuine scriptures, at this day, as in the first ages of christianity. When the New Testament was written, and these spurious writings imposed upon mankind, books were but few, and confined to the libraries of the rich;—the art of printing was not known until

fourteen centuries after;—and manuscripts, from the time and labour required in completing them, were in the possession but of few. The mode of diffusing knowledge from the press, which we in the present age happily possess, was then unknown;—and the information of the multitude, was derived from the communications of a few learned, and too often interested individuals. How easy was it then, when learning was in this state, to add to, or to interpolate, a book; and what argument against the possibility of it, can be drawn from the improbability of the success of such an attempt in the present enlightened age? Mr. A. wishes I had given a catalogue of what I deem interpolations;—to comply with this wish, I should not have the least objection, if it had belonged to my subject. They are neither many, nor important;* and I assure him, that

* But to this I must make one exception, that of the celebrated passage, 1 John v. 7, the foundation of christian idolatry, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.” “This text,” say the Editors of the Improved Version of the New Testament, “concerning the heavenly witnesses, is not contained in any Greek manuscript which was written earlier than the fifteenth century. 2. Nor in any Latin manuscript earlier than the ninth century. 3. It is not found in any of the ancient versions. 4. It is not cited by any of the Greek ecclesiastical writers, though, to prove the doctrine of the Trinity, they have cited the words before and after this text. 5. It is not cited by any of the early Latin Fathers, even when the subject upon which they treat, would naturally have led

I am neither afraid nor ashamed "to open my mind fully on this subject." But he is not confined to a *wish* upon this point, he imperiously *calls* upon me "to state the parts of the New Testament which I deny the credibility of, and the reasons which induce me to do so."—In this passage may be perceived a latent spark of that persecuting flame, which once fired the bosom of John Calvin, and which brought Servetus* to the stake. By what authority does

them to appeal to its authority. 6. It is first cited by Vigilius Tapsensis, a Latin writer of no credit, in the latter end of the fifth century, and by him, it is suspected, to have been forged. 7. It has been omitted as spurious, in many editions of the New Testament since the Reformation:—in the two first of Erasmus, in those of Aldus, Colinaeus, Zwnglius, and lately of Griesbach. 8. It is omitted by Luther in his German version. In the Old English Bibles of Henry viii. Edward vi. and Elizabeth, it was printed in small types, or included in brackets; but between the Years 1566 and 1580, it began to be printed as it now stands; by whose authority is not known."

* Michael Servetus, a Physician, was born at Villanova in Arragon, in 1509. About the year 1539, while he was at Paris studying physic, he wrote a book against the Trinity. This treatise so incensed Calvin against him, that he was determined to procure his death. This diabolical purpose he put into execution in 1553; when he had him arrested at Geneva, and after suffering the greatest deprivations and miseries of a prison, he underwent a mock trial; where Calvin was his accuser, and by his influence, he was sentenced to be burnt alive! This sentence was executed with the utmost cruelty, on the 27th of October, in the same year. "Such," says a writer, "was the end of the memorable Michael Servetus, one of the most learned and

he thus peremptorily *call* me to his bar?— Though England has heard of an Inquisition, yet will it not dread its powers, till men who possess the spirit discovered in this command, have overturned a truly learned and liberal establishment, and have succeeded to its authority. Mr. *A.* wishes for a list of those eminent men, of other parties besides my own, who join me in considering some passages as spurious.— Will the names of the archbishops Newcome and Pierce; and a Hammond, a Michaelis, a Griesbach, &c. satisfy him? if not, let him peruse many other Theological writers. But to give the names of those eminent men *not* of my own party, who agree with me, in considering the chapters in Matt. and Luke as spurious, would indeed be a task; I am not versed in the magic art of reconciling self-evident contradictions; and must therefore leave it to him, whose orthodox logic can make three one, and one three, to point out the way in which one *is*, and *is not* of the same opinion with another on the same subject.

Though Mr. *T.* has been pretty copious in his quotations, against interpolations; or rather for the sufficiency of the present translation of the scriptures; yet I have the misfortune to remain in the same opinion: or in his

most conscientious men of that, or perhaps of any other age; who fell a victim to the resentment and malice of Calvin! No wonder the slaves of bigotry and intolerance are still so numerous among his followers and admirers!"

own words, to be still "entangled in the snare of the devil;" and "to be taken captive by him at his will!" And I rejoice to find out, that "the snare of the devil" is nothing more than, clear evidence; and that the spell by which he captivates us, is no other, than sound arguments. But leaving such misapplication of scripture; the point at issue between us shall be examined.

In proof of the spuriousness of the first chapters of Matthew, I have pointed out the misapplication of the prophecy recorded in the vii. of Isaiah. As this is the main prop of the miraculous conception; I thought that my declaration of its misapplication, by the pretended Matthew, would bring upon me the utmost disapprobation of my orthodox brethren: and the event has answered my expectations. Mr. A. and Mr. T. never seem at a loss:—in the absence of sound argument, they, at least, can have recourse to their vocabulary of hard names, and opprobrious terms, and deal them about with no sparing hand. Thus, if they happen to stumble upon an argument which they cannot get over, it is sufficient to say, that it is "pushing the old *infidel* objection, which has been answered an hundred times;" and that it is dictated "in the spirit," and expressed "nearly in the language of professed deists." These gentlemen well know, that this kind of logic is better calculated, to convince the class of readers for which they write, than the clearest reasonings. For who will believe an *infidel* or

a *heretic*, when he presumes to contradict these *evangelical* gentlemen, but those who are guided by carnal reason?

Mr. A. says p. 22, "that the prophecy in Isaiah vii. 14, referred *in part* to an event which took place within a few years after its delivery, is sufficiently evident: but it is equally clear, that it did not obtain, at that time a *full* accomplishment, no account being given of the birth of that extraordinary child." Error is never without its evasions; and the orthodox conscious of the impossibility, of denying the misapplication of this, and other prophecies, have invented a way to get over the inconsistency. They assert that the prophecies of the Old Testament, have a double sense, and that they have a view to the accomplishment; of more than one event. But if they have a secondary sense, why not a third, a fourth and so on, ad infinitum, 'till at last, they may be said to be applicable to any event, which may bear a resemblance to the prediction. And is it not evident, that by this accommodation, they become no prophecies at all; but, like the heathen oracles, their sense must be determined by fortuitous circumstances? The prophecies of the Old Testament differ from these:—they have the accomplishment but of one object in view; and that they have a *double sense*, is the invention of error to serve its own cause. That there are passages capable of being applied to the Messiah, no one will

deny ; but a passage only capable of being accommodated to him, is not, by any means, a prediction of him. Mr. *A.* owns, that the primary sense of the passage in Isaiah, has reference to “ an event, which took place, within a few years after : ”—it was impossible for him to deny it ;—and it is equally impossible to suppose, that it had a secondary sense, that of the birth of Jesus Christ. But mark into what inconsistency this author is led, by contending for a secondary application of the prophecy. He says, that the primary sense has reference, to a child born *by means* of a human father ; but the secondary, to one, born *without* a human father—how ridiculous ! He says again, that it “ did not at that time obtain a *full* accomplishment, because no account is given of the birth of that extraordinary child, whose name was to be called Immanuel.” The description of Isaiah’s own child, in the next chapter, agrees so exactly with the prophecy, that there can be no doubt, but that he was the child spoken of. And the event having taken place, (by Mr. *Alliott’s* confession) of which the birth of this child was to be a sign, is a convincing proof, that the child was born ; and involves Mr. *A.* in self-contradiction.

As Mr. *A.* has quoted bishop Lowth on this point, I will also quote an author in answer to him :—“ I cannot dismiss this subject, without observing what bishop Lowth advances on chap. vii. 14—16, in order to shew this prophecy, besides its literal meaning, to have a reference

to Christ, is not of so much weight with me as with his lordship. The introduction of it is not, perhaps, more solemn than the occasion required, even on the supposition, that a deliverance from present dangers only is suggested. The hearts of Ahaz and his people were moved, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind; they were seized with the greatest consternation, when they thought the ruin of the House of David inevitable.' Nor is the introduction more solemn, than that of the prediction concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz; whose name was written on a great roll, and two faithful witnesses taken to record it, chap. viii. 1, 2. 'The sign,' says the bishop, 'is selected and given by God himself;' but this is frequently the case; as in the choice of the rainbow, Gen. ix. 12. 'It was given after Ahaz had rejected the offer of any sign of his own choosing, out of the whole compass of nature.' Ahaz's rejection of the offer is a proof of his own consternation, rather than of the transcendent importance of the sign God had vouchsafed him. And if the Almighty, notwithstanding his refusal, urged him to accept a token, how does this imply, that the sign so circumstanced, related to any thing more than present consolation? Nor can I perceive, that the terms of the prophecy, when separated from the ideas our prepossessions have annexed to them, are so peculiar as to raise hopes far beyond the present occasion. They are, 'behold a certain young woman is with child, and

shall bring forth a son,' &c. We are scarce indeed able to read this passage, without the very peculiar idea of,

‘ A virgin mother, and an infant God :’

yet these ideas cannot be said to arise from the sacred text. Nor is the name of the child more expressive, nor does the whole description, as far as I can see, contain more in it than the birth of a common (symbolical) child required or admitted. As to Immanuel’s being treated as the lord or prince of Judah, if the proper name be taken in the vocative case, the term *land* (arats) will rather signify *native country*, than *kingdom* or *domain*; and can hardly imply, that Immanuel would be a ruler in Israel. The bishop tells us, that Micah, ver. 3, obviously and plainly refers to some known prophecy concerning a woman to bring forth a child. I grant it. But there is another prediction concerning the birth of a son, upon whose shoulder government was to be placed, ix. 6, which seems much more easily referred to what Micah says of a woman, travelling and bringing forth, one who was to be a ruler in Israel. And why his lordship should imagine Micah’s words, more properly applicable to vii. 14, viii. 8, than to ix. 6, of Isaiah, I am unable to comprehend.*”

Yours, &c.

* Theo. Repos. vol. v. p. 54.

LETTER VI.

SIR,

MR. *Taylor* seems to differ from Mr. *Alliott* in his criticism, on the prophecy of Is. vii. 14, as he does not appear to allow it to have been fulfilled even in part: but "that it was evidently designed, as some other passages are, to comfort the Jews, by the assurance that God intended, at some future time, to raise up a glorious person among them; and that *until* this future time, they should continue a people, though their enemies should be ever so numerous or powerful." But Ahaz and his people, were at *that time* very much alarmed, at the prospect of an invasion by the kings of Syria and Samaria; how then could an event, which was not to take place until the lapse of more than seven hundred years after, be a sign to them that they should conquer their enemies? What "comfort" could it afford the Jews of that age, that "at some future time," a glorious person should be raised up among them? It was the *event* that was to be future, not the sign that was given as a pledge for the certainty of the accomplishment of it. Mr. *T.* inverts the order, and makes the event take place first, and then the sign, which ought to have preceded and presignified it. It is impossible that this prophecy, can have respect to the birth of Jesus

Christ of the Virgin Mary; for his birth could not have been a sign to Ahaz and his people, that Rezin and Pekah would fail in their projects: and the prophecy is limited by the context to the failure of the two kings, and the destruction of Ephraim. These two kings were destroyed—the child, therefore, whose birth is here given as a sign of that destruction, must have been born before they were destroyed—Jesus Christ was not born until more than 700 years after, consequently he could not have been the object of the prophecy.

The miraculousness of the event predicted in this prophecy, is entirely dependent on the translation of the Hebrew word (*olma*); in our present version rendered *a virgin*. I have stated in my Sermon, that it might, with more propriety, be rendered *a young woman*. This Mr. T. who according to his motto was to “speak the truth in love,” is compelled to contradict; and though he says, that “contradiction is very unpleasant work” to him, it does not appear to be so in reality, else he would not so often have recourse to it, without proper grounds for so doing. But since he wishes, and I am “able” to produce evidence in favor of this assertion, I will do it.

Mr. A. says, p. 25, that he “cannot find any place, where the word is used, in which virginity does not seem to be implied;” and to support this, he brings on the testimonies of Stockius and Buxtorf. What the former of these says, has reference to the derivation of

the word only, and is of no weight on the present point. For it appears from Harmer's Obs. ii. 403, that all women are equally secluded in the East; and Parkhurst says, that "the unmarried youth of both sexes anciently lived, in eastern countries, in a concealed retired state." But what his motive was in bringing on Buxtorf, to support the meaning he is pleased to give the word, I am at a loss to guess. Does he wish to impose upon those who are unacquainted with the Latin and Hebrew languages; or is he ignorant of them himself? Cannot he see, that the two first senses given to the word by Buxtorf, (*adolecentula*, a young woman, and *puella*, a damsel) are against his rendering? But his inadvertence, or whatever it is, is rendered more unpardonable, when we find that Buxtorf, under the very word which he quotes, says,*—"that the Hebrews say that this noun (*olma*) does not necessarily signify a state of virginity, but means a young woman *tactam* as well as *intac-*

*Hæbrei nomen hoc *olma*, ætatis esse volunt, non status virginei simpliciter, sed notare juvenulam tam *tactam* quàm *intactam*. Extat autem solùm in sequentibus locis. Gen. 24, 43. Exod. 2, 8. Psalm 68, 26. Prov. 30, 19. Cant. 1. v. 3. et 6, 8. Jesa. 7, 14. Multi nostrorum ibique Virginem incorruptam significare volunt: *Judæi duo loca excipiunt Jesaïæ et Proverbiorum*; illum falsò, hunc probaliter, ut et nostrorum nonnulli, pro virgine corrupta, virginitatem tamen adhuc profitente, illic exponunt propter comparisonem cum uxore adultera, vers. 20, quæ marito fidem conjugalem occultè frangit." Buxtorf sub nomine.

tam. And after noticing the places where the word is to be found in the Old Testament, he points out two places in which the Jews allege that a state of virginity is not meant. One of these is the passage in Isaiah under consideration; and the other is in Prov. xxx. 19, where the word is properly translated *a maid*, in our version; and, curious as it may appear, Mr. A. in the face of this, quotes this text as one in which "virginity is clearly implied;" and Mr. T. has also brought this passage forward, to prove that the Hebrew word always signifies a virgin in the strictest sense, and that I am mistaken. But let them consult that verse, and they will find, that the Jews are the best interpreters of their own scriptures; and that a virgin in the strict sense of the word, cannot be meant there, for it is used to signify an adulterous woman.

"All the orthodox fathers," says Dr. Priestley, *Theo. Repos.* vol. iv. p. 300, "say that the word in Hebrew signifies a proper virgin; but the Jews, and Symmachus the Ebionite, who were certainly better judges than the Greek or Latin fathers, say that it signifies a young woman only. Irenæus* says, that Theodosion of Ephesus, and Aquila of Pontus, both Jewish proselites, translate it, *a young woman shall bear a child*; and the Ebionites followed them, believing Jesus to be the son of Joseph."—What does Mr. T. think of this—are these "magisterial assertions without some evidence

* L. iii. c. xxiv. p. 253.

of their proof?" Is this sound criticism, or assertions "without some evidence of their truth?" And is it not very evident, that if it had not been for the misapplication of this prophecy, by the impostor who calls himself Matthew, no one would ever have dreamt of mistranslating a passage, the true meaning of which is so obvious? As to what Mr. T. says about the translation of the word in the Septuagint, it was the duty of the translators to accommodate their words to the original; and, therefore, they substitute *parthenos* which is used in as indefinite a sense as the original word itself. Of this the impostor takes advantage, and fixes its sense, in order to make it the tool of his imposture.

But says Mr. A. "where is the wonder of a young married woman bearing a child?"—Where has he ever found it spoken of, in the scriptures, as a *wonderful* thing, except in these spurious chapters? The stress he lays on the introductory word "behold," is entirely done away, when it is observed in the scriptures, introducing subjects of but little moment;—but here it may be understood, as calling the attention to a most important circumstance:—for the deliverance of a whole nation, from the dread of two powerful enemies, must have been highly interesting to the Israelites. The prophetic part of this prediction, is the *sex* of the child foretold; "a young woman shall conceive" (or *is with child*, for it may be translated in the

present tense) "and bear a son." "But a virgin conceiving," continues Mr. A. "is an event worthy of observation;" indeed it would be so; and require a faith that could swallow mountains; and evidence better supported than this impostor gives us, to believe it. But says he again, it was a "miracle." By the power of that word, I suppose he thinks, that he has presented a barrier insurmountable to human reason; and that its sound, like some wonderful talisman, will blind our understanding to the misapplication he has made of it. He supposes, that by dignifying an event, at which reason revolts, with the name of *miracle*, he has made sure of a belief of it. However, our faith is not quite so implicit; we will *dare* to examine for ourselves.

When I say, that the miraculous conception is contrary to common sense and right reason, Mr. A. says, p. 27, that upon the same ground I may deny every other miracle. No such thing;—there is a wide difference, between the other miracles recorded in the New Testament, and the one of the miraculous conception. When the plan of Providence for enlightening the world, is taken into consideration, we have a body of arguments *à priori*, which will make the miracles wrought by our Saviour and his apostles, perfectly consistent and necessary. But what necessity was there for the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ? What end did it, or could it answer?—None!—for according to Mr. A. and Mr. T's confessions, it

was not made known during his ministry. The Almighty then interposed, and performed the most wonderful, the most stupendous of miracles, for no purpose! Far different from this, was the case with the other miracles recorded in the New Testament:—however trivial they may appear to us, they have all of them an object in view:—they are intended either to convince the audience then present, or were performed in order to afford irrefragable proofs to future ages, of the divine mission of Jesus Christ; and of the truth of the doctrines which he delivered. Thus, it is not because, that I think it, irrational to believe the possibility of the existence of miracles of any kind, that I disbelieve this; but because it is not supported by the same evidence as the others are; and because I am convinced, that the Almighty never performed one in vain.

What advantage did Jesus derive from his miraculous birth; was there any thing that he performed, during the whole of his ministry, which might not have been equally well performed by a man born like other men, who at the the same time, was gifted by God, with powers equal to, their accomplishment? I will venture to say, that there were none:—and must rely on his own words, John v. 19. “the Son can do nothing of himself.” Mr. A. does, most certainly, misunderstand the phrase “common sense:”—what I meant by it was, that portion of the intellectual and discerning powers, which is in general possessed, and which I believe

is its most common acceptance. He understands it to signify the general opinion of mankind; and from that universal opinion he, as well as Mr. T. draws an argument for the miraculous conception. But if we are to determine a question according to the number of its advocates, then, even their creed, popular as it is, will stand but a poor chance of being pronounced the true one. Popery, and many other false religions, will be found, by far, to overpower them, in these numerical arguments: and this mode of settling the truth, will lead us, once more, to worship the Virgin Mary as well as her Son; or to bow our knees to stocks and stones.

Mr. T. disapproves of my criticism on the word Immanuel. He misunderstands me;—I did not mean to say, that the child predicted should be called a God;—what I meant was, that God, by appointing the symbolical name Immanuel, engaged to protect his people from the power of their enemies and oppressors. This mode of giving symbolical names to children, born according to the ordinary course of nature, was in common use among the Hebrews; an example of which may be seen in the beginning of the chapter next to that in which this prophecy is recorded. Mr. T. also objects, to my confining the sense of the prophecy to the time of Ahaz only, because the addressing it to Ahaz, “is both contrary to grammar, and to the declaration of the prophet.” But is not the sign, granted in verse 14, for the same pur-

pose as that *refused* in verse 11 ; and, if so, they must have the same prediction in view ? I consider it, therefore, addressed through Ahaz to the House of David, and have used the plural pronoun *you*, as using it when the singular number is intended, is sanctioned by the custom of most modern languages ; and, therefore, it is *not* "contrary to grammar."

Having thus examined this prophecy and seen, that there is no foundation for its secondary application to Jesus Christ ; and also, that the fulfilment of it is limited, to the space of three years after its delivery ; we cannot less than conclude, that so gross a misapplication of it, must be a very weighty argument to prove the person who did so, to be an impostor ; and his writings to be unfounded in truth.

Yours, &c.

LETTER VII.

SIR,

WHAT has been said in the foregoing Letter, concerning the misapplication of the prophecy in Isaiah, may also be said of the passages in Hosea xi. 1, and Jer. xxxi. 15 ; and Mr. *Alliott* and Mr. *Taylor* have no other apology to

offer for the imposture, than the old hackneyed and unfounded one, of a secondary application. The Rachael who is represented as in sorrow in the last of these; I reply in answer to Mr. A's inquiry, is the Children of Israel, who are figuratively called so, from the name of Rachael, the wife of Jacob.

But I have not yet done with this gentleman who calls himself Matthew. Let us follow him in the imaginary journey which he makes our Saviour take to Egypt; and which he says is the fulfilment of a prophecy in Hosea xi. 1, which, by the bye, is no prophecy at all.—First then, Herod's anger is made to kindle into the utmost fury, when he hears of the birth of so powerful a rival as Jesus; and in order to make sure of his destruction, he contemplates and and puts into execution, the most brutal and cruel of actions:—he murdered “all the children that were in Bethlehem, and the coasts thereof, from two years old and under.” We ought, according to an old adage, to give even the worst of beings his due; and Herod, with all his imperfections on his head, cannot be supposed capable of so much inhumanity as is here represented; at least not without some better proof than we at present possess. Josephus, and other Roman historians, have given us a very particular account of his character, and have recorded some acts of cruelty of which he was guilty, in his own family; but not one word about this. What could this silence proceed from, but from his never having commit-

ted the inhuman butchery which the impostor lays to his charge? for it is not likely that an atrocity, unparalleled in the annals of tyranny, could have remained unrecorded by so many cotemporary writers.

Besides making this the fulfilment of a prophecy, the impostor makes it the occasion of Joseph, the father of Jesus, dreaming a dream, in which he is admonished to fly into Egypt with Jesus, in order to escape the cruelty of Herod.— Here he remained until the death of Herod, and then returned into the land of Israel. “But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea, in the room of his father Herod, he was affraid to go thither: notwithstanding being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee; and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth,” Matt. ii. 22, 23.— “Here,” says Mr. Evanson, “the reader is requested to remark; first, that Galilee having been as much under Herod’s jurisdiction as Judea, and his kingdom having been divided among his sons after his death, it was a son of Herod’s who reigned in his stead, in Galilee, as well as Judea, consequently the child Jesus could be no securer in one province than in another. He is next desired to cast his eyes on the map of Palestine, and observe how impossible it was for Joseph to have gone from Egypt to Nazareth, without travelling through the whole extent of Archelaus’ kingdom, unless he undertook a long perigrination through the deserts, on the North and East of the lake Asphalites

and the country of Moab, and then either crossed the Jordan into Samaria, or the lake of Gennesareth into Galilee, and from thence went to the city of Nazareth: and if it were at all credible that the latter was the case, with what propriety could such a tedious journey have been denominated, *turning aside into the parts of Galilee?*"*

I much suspect, that the whole of this story, of the flight into Egypt, was invented in order to make the spurious account, as consistent as possible with the genuine gospel. For Jesus is called every where, except in those chapters, "Jesus of Nazareth," and not Jesus of Bethlehem, which like "Saul of Tarsus," ought to have been his appellation, if he had been born at Bethlehem. His being born at Bethlehem is said to be the fulfilment of the prophecy in Micah v. 2; but that prophecy does not imply that the Messiah should be *born* there, but that he should *spring* from there; intimating, that he should be a descendant of David, who, as well as his father Jesse, was born there. Every Israelite was said to have come from Bethlehem, though not born there, and though perhaps he had never been there. Let the quotation be compared with the text in Micah, and it will be seen, that it is altered, and these alterations could not have been made by a Jew, or by a person who wrote in the country where the transaction he records had taken place. Atha-

* Dissonance p. 160.

nasius says,* "that it was the opinion of Paulus Samosatensis, and therefore it is thought to be the general opinion of the Unitarians of the first age, that Jesus was born at Nazareth, and not at Bethlehem.

His coming to live at Nazareth, after his return from Egypt, is said to fulfil a prophecy, in which it is foretold that he should be called a Nazarene. But if his dwelling at Nazareth gained him the appellation of Nazarene, then his residence at Capernaum, John ii. 12, would procure him that of Capernaumite; but we do not find this to have been the case. The non-existence of any such prophecy in the Jewish scriptures, is also a proof of the imposition. Mr. A. says, "and so because Mr. D. cannot find this prophecy—it never existed. Excellent proof this!!" Notwithstanding his two notes of admiration, and his ironical use of the word excellent, I think that persons, who are fonder of a solid argument than of empty declamation, will much suspect the veracity of a writer, who appeals to testimony which is not to be found; and which we have reason to believe never did exist. Though I have neither read all, nor heard "all that the prophets ever wrote;" yet I am led to believe, and to expect, that when the truth of an event recorded in the New Testament, is made to depend upon, the existence of a prediction of it in the Old, that I am to find it recorded there:—but this I am

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* De adventu, Christi. Opera. v. i. p. 637.

not able to do in the present case. The prophecy quoted by Jude as Enoch's, is not a parallel case; he gives it as a quotation from some apocryphal book, but does not vouch for the authenticity of it; but this is given as of sacred authority, "so that it was fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets."

The visit of the eastern Magians, is also an incredible story. The very pointed Jewish law existing against such persons, Deut. xviii. 10, 11; their flagitious and depraved characters; and the detestation of the Jews to men of such professions, make it highly improbable, that God should make men of such characters, the first acquainted with the performance of so stupendous a miracle; or induce him to suspend the laws of nature, as in the case of the directing star, in order to sanction an act, contrary to Truth and reason. The arrival of the wise men, or astrologers, must also have been intended to prepare the Jewish nation to believe Jesus to be the Messiah, even from his birth;—and thus have made unnecessary the miracles he performed, in confirmation of his right to the title, and prematurely exalted him to an office, which, we know, he did not enter into until thirty years after. There is an inconsistency also in their saying, that they had seen his star in the East; for if they had seen it in that direction, they must have come from the West:—but they are said to be, *wise men from the East*. This proves the original story to have reference to some other place than Jerusa-

lem; a place that was West of the country from which the diviners came; which before we conclude, will be shewn to be in reality the case.

But says Mr. A. p. 22, "the miraculous conception has the testimony of the highest antiquity in its favor;" we have also the testimony of the highest antiquity *against it*. For the authenticity of the first chapters of Matthew, he quotes Origen and Irenæus.

Too much stress has been laid upon the testimony of what are called the christian fathers: their authority, in the decision of theological points, is dwindling away very fast; and happily, christians begin to make use of their *own* understandings, instead of those of men in whose many fanciful and ridiculous opinions, antiquity alone has made us acquiesce so long. Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and many others, were proselytes from heathen philosophy to christianity; and it is to be regretted, that when they abandoned the Platonic sect, they did not also relinquish many of the absurd notions of Platonism. Origen is, certainly, a writer of some eminence; but his single authority is not to be relied upon, when it contradicts the clear evidence that may be found in the New Testament. The internal evidence contained in the first chapters of Matthew must, in every mind open to conviction, outweigh the authority of any individual; particularly, when it is known that, that individual has erred in many other points.

Origen was credulous, and enthusiastical:—his mistaken zeal and devotion, led him to commit the most unnatural and unnecessary actions; and induced him to practice the most rigid self-denial. After his conversion to christianity, he yet retained the belief of that distinguished tenet of Platonism, the pre-existence of souls: and his partiality for allegorizing led him to the most erroneous interpretations of scripture. Surely then his testimony, though it may deserve some attention, is not to pass unquestioned; particularly when it is found, that men as eminent for knowledge and learning as himself, entered the lists as his opponents. But says Mr. A. there were none who disbelieved the miraculous conception, but those who were “deemed heretics,” and who “had adopted schemes of the most visionary nature.” That declaration rests entirely on the testimony of the orthodox; as there are none of the works of those who were reputed heretics in existence, but what are found in the works of their opponents: and how far we can justly form an opinion, of their whole works from the quotations from them by their orthodox opponents, we may judge from Mr. A. and Mr. T’s works. For what sentiments posterity would entertain of me, if nothing more of my writings were in existence than what may be found in their pamphlets, may be easily guessed. Mr. Jones, in his learned and ingenious work “*Developement of Remarkable Events*,” has fully proved, from an Epistle of Jerom’s, to

be found in Jeremiah Jones on the Canon, vol. ii. p. 95, that the first christian fathers were not unacquainted with the spuriousness of these chapters. Whether Irenæus and Origen were of this number I know not: it is most likely that they were; and that, from their misguided zeal for the christian religion, they assisted in imposing them upon the christian world.

What conclusion then are we to draw from Irenæus' and Origen's quoting these chapters, but this;—they were then in existence; and whether they knew them to be spurious, or thought them genuine; they knew that they would serve their purpose, and therefore refer to them as inspired writings.

Yours, &c.

LETTER VIII.

SIR,

THAT the miraculous conception was not universally believed in the first ages of christianity, is confirmed by the testimony of many learned men. It is generally thought, that Matthew wrote his gospel, for the instruction of the Jewish converts, in the Hebrew language; or rather in the Syro-Chaldaic. These

converts went under the name of Nazarenes or Ebionites; for, from the accounts given of them, they seem to entertain the same belief.— These christians did not believe in the miraculous conception, and their gospel did not contain the history of it.

Justin Martyr, who is the first christian writer who makes mention of them, does not give the least hint, that any of them believed it: and Irenæus* says, that they did not admit of the Spirit to have come upon Mary, or that the power of the Highest had overshadowed her. Origen† says, that all the Jewish christians, in his time, went under the name of Ebionites, “some of them think him (Jesus) to be the son of Joseph and Mary, others of Mary and the Holy Spirit, but without acknowledging his divinity.” Eusebius, who lived about 100 years after Origen, says, that the Ebionites continued, in his time, unbelievers in the miraculous conception; and, as I have said in my Sermon, Epiphanius and Jerom also say, that they did not believe it.

Epiphanius, I confess, is not the best authority; but when it is considered, that he was a great advocate for the miraculous conception, and an inveterate enemy of the Ebionites; whatever testimony he is forced to give, against his own system, cannot fall under the same suspicion as many parts of his other writings. He

* Lib. 5. cap. i. p. 394.

† In Matthew, Comment. vol. i. p. 427.

describes* the gospel of the Ebionites, as beginning at the third chapter of the present copies of Matthew. The Ebionites maintained, that the copy of the gospel which they possessed, and which wanted the two first chapters, was the genuine work of the apostle. Jerom says,† that “the gospel used by the Nazarenes and Ebionites, was by most, called the authentic gospel of Matthew:” and from his commentary on Matt. ii. 6, it is evident, that the Nazarene copy, in his possession, did not contain the story of the miraculous conception.—Speaking of the substitution of the word *Judea* instead of *Juda* in that verse, he says, “I am of opinion, that the reading that came from the Evangelist, was in the Hebrew itself (that is in the Hebrew of Micah, from which the prophecy is taken) *Judæ*, not *Judææ*.”§ Here then it is seen, though from his own declarations, it is well known, that he had a copy of the Nazarene gospel by him, yet he had recourse to conjecture; which is a proof that this part of Matthew, and consequently, that the account of the miraculous conception, was not in his copy. Thus I have “frankly and explicitly brought forward,” according to Mr. T’s desire, my

* Apud Suiceri Thesaur. vol. i. p. 1231.

† “In evangelio, quo utuntur Nazareni et Ebionitæ, quod nuper in Græcum de Hebræo sermone transtulimus et quod vocatur a plerisque Matthæi authenticam &c.” In Matt. cap. 12 Opera, vol. vi. p. 21.

§ Vide Pope’s Miraculous Conception, p. 98.

documents from Epiphanius and Jerom, in support of my declaration, that these chapters were not to be found in the Nazarene and Ebionite copies:—and I cannot less than think it both ungenerous and illiberal of him, to call my veracity in question, and give no other apology for doing so, but his indolence and reluctance to examine. For it appears, that though he did “not expect to find what I asserted” was to be found in Jerom’s works, that it was there.

The corrupted state in which the gospels of the Nazarenes and Ebionites appear, in the fragments which we possess of them, is no argument against their existence at some former time, in a much less corrupted state:—such an argument would bear equally against the other gospels. For we owe the perfect state in which the four gospels now appear to the industry of collators alone, for even these will be found, in many manuscripts, very much corrupted and interpolated.

Having said thus much of the gospel of Matthew, it only remains, that I should notice the evidence for the spuriousness of the first chapters of Luke’s gospel.

It is well known, that Marcion, a man of learning and integrity, who flourished in the second century, had a copy of the gospel of Luke, which began at the third chapter of our present one; and which he affirmed was all that Luke ever wrote.* It is true, that Mar-

* Epiphanius, *Hæc.* xlii. Opera, vol. i. p. 312.

cion, like myself, was a *reputed* heretic; but as none of his writings are now in existence, we cannot be capable of forming a judgment on that point:—we have only the good word of his orthodox opponents for it; and from their avidity to silence him, and from their destruction of all the books which they were pleased to term *heretical*, we have reason to suppose, that these works contained something which they did not much relish—perhaps some solid arguments, which they judged would be most effectually answered by a commitment to the flames. However, his being termed a heretic, by those, who, because they were the most numerous, appropriated to themselves the name of *orthodox*, will not lessen his authority, in the estimation of any unprejudiced person. But, happily we need not rest the proof of the spuriousness of these chapters on his testimony alone; we have better—that of Luke himself.

Luke, in his address of his second history, or rather of his continuation of the history of christianity after the ascension of our Saviour, addresses the person for whose instruction he had written his gospel, in this manner:—"The former relation I made, O Theophilus, concerning all which Jesus undertook, both to do and to teach, until the day in which he was taken up," Acts i. 1, 2. But upon a reference to this "former relation," we find that it does not simply contain an account "of all which Jesus undertook both to do and to teach," but also

a long and fabulous account of his miraculous birth ; and that the history of his teachings and actions does not commence until we come to the third chapter. What, then, are we to conclude from this, but that Luke never wrote the other two chapters. Luke does not undertake to give the history of the *whole* life of Jesus to his friend, but of the few years in which he was engaged in his public ministry. Instead of that, we have in his gospel, as it now stands, a most curious account of his wonderful conception and birth, attended with long and very improbable speeches: these are put into the mouth of an angel, who is called Gabriel, as if that word was a proper name, and did not signify a celestial being in a human form.—But I suppose this is done, in imitation of Daniel, who calls the one, who appeared to him in a prophetic vision, by that name. After his birth we hear nothing of him for twelve years, and again we lose sight of him for eighteen more. Is this consistent with the elegant method, and strict order of Luke?—No, for the very style of these spurious chapters betrays them. Luke may be classed among the most elegant and correct of Greek writers; his language is pure and nervous; forming a most direct contrast to the flimsy and incoherent diction of these imperfect imitations. And what proves, beyond a doubt, that Luke never wrote these chapters is, that he does not make the least allusion to the wonderful events which

they describe, in any other part of his gospel ; or in his acts of the apostles.

The great chronological disagreement, which I pointed out, between the account of the impostor Matthew, and the real Luke, as to the time of our Saviour's birth, has exasperated Mr. T. not a little. Not contented with plain English, he discharges a volley of Latin words at me ; which, lest the common reader should be alarmed, and mistake them for sentences of excommunication, I would assure him are very harmless ; meaning no more, than " magisterial assertions," and such other kind phrases, by which Mr. T. vents his spleen.

Though Dr. Lardner has very amply discussed this question, yet I think he has failed in reconciling the disagreement of the two Evangelists. Is it then to be wondered at, if Mr. T. who follows him, should also be unable to make them agree. To carry back the commencement of Tiberius's reign, two or three years before he actually did begin to reign, has been proposed as the only solution of the difficulty ; but it depends entirely upon the supposition, that the years in which he was a colleague with Augustus, make a part of the fifteen years in which Jesus is said to " be about thirty years of age." But this is unlikely, as well, from the correctness of the Roman chronology, as, from the improbability of these three years, being employed to compose a part of the reigns, both of Augustus and Tiberius.

However, to prove this point more fully, I

will quote the words of a learned author to whom I have referred before.* “I shall conclude this proposition,” says he, “with proving, from a comparison of Luke and Josephus, that our Lord was *not* born in the days of Herod the king.”

“In the account which we have examined, it is said, that Herod killed all the children from two years old and under. From this we may infer, that Jesus was two years of age when he was conveyed into Egypt. There he was commanded to stay till the death of Herod. Now we cannot suppose that this event took place immediately; else why was he sent to a country so distant to avoid the anger of Herod, if he was soon to die? Jesus, therefore, must have been some time in Egypt, before the death of the king. The author of the gospel of our Saviour's *Infancy*, makes his continuance there to be *three years*. Lest this be thought too much, let it be limited to two. Our Lord then, when Herod died, was four years of age. When that event took place, *Philip* the son of Herod, became Tetrach of Trachonitis, which, with the two provinces of Batenea and Gaulanitis, he governed *thirty-seven years*. This, his last year, was, as we learn from Josephus,† the *twenty-eight of the reign of Tiberius*; the thirty-second of his government must, therefore,

* Development vol. i. p. 365.

† Antiq. Jud. Lib. xviii, cap. v. sect. vi.

have been the fifteenth of that emperor."

"But Jesus was born, as we have seen, four years before the death of Herod, and of course, before Philip was made governor. Our Lord then, according to this calculation, was *thirty-six* years old in the fifteenth of Tiberius.. But the Evangelist Luke says expressly, that he then began to be about thirty years of age; consequently Jesus was not born till about *two years after* the death of Herod the Great." Dates are obstinate things: they cannot be twisted and turned about, to support every imposition which may be practised upon mankind:—and though error may fly to its evasions, and have recourse to its subtilities, *they* remain as unsurmountable barriers to its success. The fact of John the Baptist's not knowing Jesus, when he came to be baptized of him, is also improbable, if the account given in these chapters was true; and is another argument against their genuineness. For if the close intimacy which is represented, in these chapters, had really subsisted between Mary and Elizabeth, it was almost an impossibility for them not to have been well known to each other. Mr. A. and Mr. T. say, that the parents of John might have died when he was yet an infant, and thus he might never have been informed of the wonderful events that preceded their births. But is this likely?—Is it not more so, if the account had been true, that either the parents, or some other person, would have acquainted them, of

the angelic annunciations, and the many uncommon predictions respecting them; and thus have brought them, at whatever distance they might have lived from each other, to habits of the closest intimacy?—it must. This, however, was not the case:—John and Jesus were perfect strangers to one another; and the Baptist would not have known Jesus to have been the Messiah, had it not been for the annunciation from heaven. Here, then, we are under the necessity of “rejecting the belief of an event, which had a close connection with our Saviour’s ministry, and which is related in the the most unvarying manner by all the evangelists; or that of one which has none of these characters, and which is, in the highest degree, improbable.”*

Another objection to the genuineness of these chapters, arises from the great historical difficulty found in chap. ii. 1, 2, of this gospel: “and it came to pass in those days, that there went a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed; and this taxing was made, when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.” Now an event of such importance (if it had been true) as taxing or enrolling the whole world, or even the Roman empire, was not likely to escape the notice of all the Greek and Roman historians; but in this case it has.—Besides, as Jesus is said to have been born in the time of Herod the king, Judea could not,

* Pope’s *Miraculous Conception*, p. 195.

at that time, have been a Roman province, and, therefore, was not liable to be taxed by the Roman emperor. It is also well known, that Cyrenius was not governor of Syria, until above ten years after the birth of our Saviour. I well know what Dr. Lardner has said on this subject; and how he has endeavoured to reconcile these disagreements:—but to me his reasonings are far from being conclusive; and I think, that there is no other way of solving the difficulty, but by granting that the writings are spurious, and, therefore, that the account they give is unfounded.

The difference of the accounts of the miraculous conception, as given in the two gospels, cannot but strike an attentive reader. Luke has omitted the story of the wise men of the East; the massacre of the children of Bethlehem by Herod; and the flight into Egypt.—Matthew, on the other hand, says nothing of the speeches made by the angels; of the story of the shepherds; and of the prophecies of Anna and Simeon, which Luke relates. These differences in the relation, were not likely to happen, if both the authors had written the description of a fact that had really existed:—on the other hand, they are accounted for, on the supposition, that the compilers of these stories, were not well informed concerning what they pretended to relate; or that their tale had no foundation in truth.

Thus I have brought my evidence for the spuriousness of the first chapters of Luke;

which, together with that to be found in other places in these Letters, will go very far in convincing those who are open to conviction, that they were not written by Luke himself. Mr. A. and Mr. T. say, that I promised to bring my testimony on in my Sermon, but failed to do it. They will now, however, see, that this failure did *not* proceed from the *want of testimony*, but, as stated, from *want of time*. And though no arguments for the spuriousness of these chapters, were introduced into the Sermon, they had them in a Note at the bottom of the page: and it is curious to hear these gentlemen complaining of the want of the arguments, which, at the same time, they are discussing.

Yours, &c.

LETTER IX.

SIR,

Mr. *Alliott* wishes I "had told who the persons were who forged" these chapters, "when and where they lived." The number of pages at which my answer has already arrived, precludes the possibility of my entering into a long discussion upon this point: a few words must, therefore, suffice for the present; and for a more

extensive view of the subject, I must refer my reader, to the source from which I have myself derived the information, which I am going to offer.

Mr. Jones, in the work already cited,* has proved, that the introductory chapters, ascribed to Matthew, are taken out of "the Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus," and those of Luke are taken out of "the Gospel of Mary." Both these gospels are now in existence, and may be found in Jeremiah Jones on the Canon, vol. ii. p. 78. 168. Many passages in the introductory chapters of Matthew and Luke, are taken verbatim from these gospels; and Mr. Jones has amply proved that these *acknowledged* spurious gospels, were the first written. He says, "that the supposed miraculous birth of Jesus Christ, is a fabrication of the Priests of Isis at Rome, copied from the adultery of a woman devoted to the vilest of the heathen deities." This woman's name was Paulina; and Josephus† gives a full account of the deception that was practised upon her, in order to make her believe that the god Isis was desirous of an interview with her; when, in reality, it was a man, who personated the god, and who had bribed the Priests to bring about his criminal purpose. One of the gospels above-mentioned, was composed by the wicked Jew, whom Josephus men-

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* Developement vol. i. p. 435, 448.

† Antiq. Jud. Lib. xviii, cap. iii. sect. iv.

tions; and the other by a THAUMUS, noticed by Plutarch.

The whole account of the miraculous conception of Jesus, agrees so exactly with the story of the pretended miraculous conception of Paulina at Rome; that there can be no doubt, but that it was the origin of the fabulous account of the birth of our Saviour: and, that what is said to have occurred in Judea, did, in reality, happen at Rome.

Such is a short sketch of the account, which this learned writer has given us, of the origin and author of the first chapters attached to the genuine gospels of Matthew and Luke. We have seen, from the cursory view I have taken in these Letters, of the evidence against their genuineness, that it is impossible they should be the works of their reputed authors; as they contain the most palpable contradictions to many other parts of the Old and New Testaments. The miraculous conception, if true, cannot be said to form any part of the genuine gospel; for, it must be allowed, that Jesus Christ taught all that is necessary to our salvation, but he has *never taught us* to believe that he was miraculously born. The miraculous conception is, also, of no use to christianity; for it neither adds to the dignity, nor to the authority of Jesus Christ: while, at the same time, it very much affects the credit of both Matthew and Luke as historians:—and, from the fabulous air which it bears, it gives occasion to many persons, to reject christianity altoge-

ther. It also entirely does away the efficacy of Christ's example in regulating ours. For, if he possessed a nature different from, and superior to ours, he can be no pattern for us? If he was God, how could he be a proper object of temptation? And if he, as God, or a pre-existent Being of any kind, rose from the dead, how does that afford us proof that human beings shall rise?

For disbelieving in the miraculous conception; a doctrine as inconsistent with revelation as it is contrary to reason, I am branded with the name of unbeliever:—but, if to believe in the existence of ONE supreme and Almighty God, and in Jesus Christ as the Messenger of that God, sent to lead mankind in the way of salvation, and to instruct them to aspire to a life after this: and if a firm belief in the scriptures, as a revelation from heaven, does *not* constitute an unbeliever, then ~~am I not one~~: and let those who charge me with it, *blush* for their injustice.

I must now reluctantly lay down my pen; yet not without a hope that my opponents, will soon afford me another opportunity of taking it up; and of doing greater justice to the subject, than it was possible for me to do within the small compass of this pamphlet: and while I return them my most cordial thanks, for bringing the discussion of the subject before the public,

I remain your obedient Servant,

MILLFORD, }
Sep. 5, 1809. }

D. Davies.

ERRATA.

Page 25, line 9, bot. for promogenitureship read, *primogenitureship*.

- 27, line 17, for alledges read, *alleges*.
31, 14, bot. for biggotted read, *bigotted*.
33, 5, for othodoxy read, *orthodoxy*.
41, 17, dele the word *the*.
46, 1, for affraid read, *afraid*,
46, note 14, for nown read, *now*.
53, line 10, for shold read, *should*.
63, 15, for affraid, read, *afraid*.
66, 18, for act read, *art*.
71, 12, bot. for recouse read, *recourse*.
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